

# Beasley's Christmas Party

By BOOTH TARKINGTON

## "QUEER?"

SYNOPSIS—Newcomer in a small town, a young newspaper man, who tells the story, is amazed by the unaccountable actions of a man who, from the window of a fine house, apparently has converse with invisible personages, particularly mentioning one "Simple-doria." Next morning he discovers his strange neighbor is the Hon. David Beasley, prominent politician, and universally respected.

It—Continued.

"One twenty-five," I answered, and felt my ears growing red with mortification. Too late, I remembered that the new-comer in a community should guard his tongue among the natives until he has unraveled the skein of their relationships, alliances, feuds and private wars—a precept not unlike the classic injunction:

Yes, my darling daughter; Hang your clothes on the hickory limb, But don't go near the water.

However, in my confusion I warmly regretted my failure to follow it, and resolved not to blunder again.

Mr. Dowden thanked me for the information for which he had no real desire, and the elderly ladies again taking up (with all too evident relief) their various mild debates, he inquired if I played bridge. "But I forget," he added. "Of course you'll be at the Despatch office in the evenings, and can't be here." After which he immediately began to question me about my work, making his determination to give me no opportunity again to mention the Honorable David Beasley unnecessarily conspicuous, as I thought.

I could only conclude that some unpleasantness had arisen between himself and Beasley, probably of political origin, since they were both in politics, and of personal (and consequently bitter) development; and that Mr. Dowden found the mention of Beasley not only unpleasant to himself but a possible embarrassment to the ladies (who, I supposed, were aware of the quarrel) on his account.

After lunch, not having to report at the office immediately, I took unto myself the solace of a cigar, which kept me company during a stroll about Mrs. Apperthwaite's capacious yard. In the rear I found an old-fashioned rose-garden—the bushes long since bloomless and now brown with autumn—and I paced its gravelled paths up and down, at the same time favoring Mr. Beasley's house with a covert study that would have done credit to a porch-climber, for the sting of my blunder at the table was quiescent, or at least neutralized, under the itch of curiosity far from satisfied concerning the interesting premises next door. The gentleman in the dressing-gown, I was sure, could have been no other than the Honorable David Beasley himself. He came not in eyeshot now, neither he nor any other; there was no sign of life about the place. That portion of his yard which lay behind the house was not within my vision. It is true, his property being here separated from Mrs. Apperthwaite's by a board fence higher than a tall man could reach; but there was no sound from the other side of this partition, save that caused by the quiet movement of rusty leaves in the breeze.

My cigar was at half-length when the green lattice door of Mrs. Apperthwaite's back porch was opened and Miss Apperthwaite, bearing a saucer of milk, issued therefrom, followed, hastily, by a very white, fat cat, with a pink ribbon round its neck, a vibrant nose, and fixed, voracious eyes uplifted to the saucer. The lady and her cat entered to view a group as pretty as a popular painting; it was even improved when, stooping, Miss Apperthwaite set the saucer upon the ground, and, continuing in that posture, stroked the cat. To bend so far is a test of a woman's grace, I have observed.

She turned her face toward me and smiled. "I'm almost at the age, you see."

"What age?" I asked, stupidly enough.

"When we take to cats," she said, rising. "Spinsterhood we like to call it. 'Single-blessedness!'"

"That is your kind heart. You decline to make one of us happy to the despair of all the rest."

She laughed at this, though with no very genuine mirth, I marked, and let my 1830 attempt at gallantry pass without return.

"You seemed interested in the old place yonder." She indicated Mr. Beasley's house with a nod.

"Oh, I understood my blunder," I said, quickly. "I wish I had known

the subject was embarrassing or unpleasant to Mr. Dowden."

"What made you think that?"

"Surely," I said, "you saw how pointedly he cut me off."

"Yes," she returned thoughtfully. "He rather did, it's true. At least, I see how you got that impression." She seemed to muse upon this, letting her eyes fall; then, raising them, allowed her far-away gaze to rest upon the house beyond the fence, and said, "It is an interesting old place."

"And Mr. Beasley himself?" I began.

"Oh," she said, "he isn't interesting. That's his trouble!"

"You mean his trouble not to—"

She interrupted me, speaking with sudden, surprising energy, "I mean he's a man of no imagination."

"No imagination!" I exclaimed.

"None in the world! Not one ounce of imagination! Not one grain!"

"Then who," I cried—"or what—is Simple-doria?"

"Simple—what?" she said, plainly mystified.

"Simple-doria," she repeated, and laughed. "What in the world is that?"

"You never heard of it before?"

"Never in my life."

"You've lived next door to Mr. Beasley a long time, haven't you?"

"All my life."

"And I suppose you must know him pretty well."

"What next?" she said, smiling.

"You said he lived there all alone."

I went on, tentatively.

"Except for an old colored couple, his servants."

"Can you tell me—I hesitated.

"Has he ever been thought—well, 'queer'?"

"Never!" she answered, emphatically. "Never anything so exciting! Merely dead and hopelessly commonplace." She picked up the saucer, now exceedingly empty, and set it upon



She Touched Me Lightly but Peremptorily on the Arm in Warning, and I Stopped.

a shelf by the lattice door. "What was it about—that was that name?—'Simple-doria'?"

"I will tell you," I said. And I related in detail the singular performance of which I had been a witness in the late moonlight before that morning's dawn. As I talked, we half unconsciously moved across the lawn together, finally seating ourselves upon a bench beyond the rosebeds and near the high fence. The interest my companion exhibited in the narration might have surprised me had my nocturnal experience itself been less surprising. She interrupted me now and then with little, half-checked ejaculations of acute wonder, but sat for the most part with her elbow on her knee and her chin in her hand, her face turned eagerly to mine and her lips parted in half-breathless attention. There was nothing "far away" about her eyes now; they were widely and intently alert.

When I finished, she shook her head slowly, as if quite dumfounded, and altered her position, leaning against the back of the bench and gazing straight before her without speaking. It was plain that her neighbor's extraordinary behavior had revealed a phase of his character novel enough to be startling.

"One explanation might be just barely possible," I said. "If it is, it is the most remarkable case of somnambulism on record. Did you ever hear of Mr. Beasley's walking in his—"

She touched me lightly but peremptorily on the arm in warning, and I stopped. On the other side of the board fence a door opened creakily, and there sounded a loud and cheerful voice—that of the gentleman in the dressing-gown.

"Here we come!" it said; "me and big Bill Hammersley. I want to show Bill I can jump anyways three times as far as he can! Come on, Bill."

"Is that Mr. Beasley's voice?" I asked, under my breath.

Miss Apperthwaite nodded in affirmation.

"Could he have heard me?"

"No," she whispered. "He's just come out of the house." And then to herself, "Who under heaven is Bill Hammersley? I never heard of him!"

"Of course, Bill," said the voice beyond the fence, "if you're afraid I'll beat you too badly, you've still got time to back out. I did understand you to kind of hint that you were considerable of a jumper, but if—(What? What? you say, Bill?) There ensued a moment's complete silence. "Oh, all right," the voice then continued. "You say you're in this to win, do you? Well, so'm I, Bill Hammersley; so'm I. Who'll go first? Me? At right—from the edge of the walk here. Now then! One—two—three! Ha!"

A sound came to our ears of some one landing heavily—and at full length, it seemed—on the turf, followed by a slight, rusty groan in the same voice. "Ugh! Don't you laugh, Bill Hammersley! I haven't jumped as much as I ought to, these last twenty years; I reckon I've kind of lost the hang of it. Ah! There were indications that Mr. Beasley was picking himself up, and brushing his trousers with his hands. "Now, it's your turn, Bill. What say?" Silence again, followed by, "Yes, I'll make Simple-doria get out of the way. Come here, Simple-doria. Now, Bill, put your heels together on the edge of the walk. That's right. All ready? Now then! One for the money—two for the show—three to make ready—and four for to GO!" Another silence. "By jingo, Bill Hammersley, you've beat me! Ha, ha! That was a jump! What say?" Silence once more. "You say you can do even better than that? Now, Bill, don't brag. Oh! you say that was up in Scotland, where you had a spring-board? Oh! All right; let's see how far you can jump when you really try. There! Heels on the walk again. That's right; swing your arms. One—two—three! There you go!" Another silence. "Zing! Well, sir, I'll be eternally snatched to flinders if you didn't do it that time, Bill Hammersley! I see I never really saw any jumping before in all my born days. It's eleven feet if it's an inch. What? You say you—"

I heard no more, for Miss Apperthwaite, her face flushed and her eyes shining, beckoned me impersonally to follow her, and departed so hurriedly that it might be said she ran.

"I don't know," said I, keeping at her elbow, "whether it's more like 'Alice' or the interlocutor's conversation at a minstrel show."

"Hush!" she warned me, though we were already at a safe distance, and did not speak again until we had reached the front walk. There she paused, and I noted that she was trembling—and, no doubt correctly, judged her emotion to be that of consternation.

"There was no one there!" she exclaimed. "He was all by himself! It was just the same as what you saw last night!"

"Evidently."

"Did it sound to you"—there was a little awed tremor in her voice that I found very appealing—"did it sound to you like a person who'd lost his mind?"

"I don't know," I said. "I don't know at all what to make of it."

"He couldn't have been"—her eyes grew very wide—"intoxicated!"

"No. I'm sure it wasn't that."

"Then I don't know what to make of it, either. All that wild talk about 'Bill Hammersley' and 'Simple-doria' and spring-boards in Scotland and—"

"And an eleven-foot jump," I suggested.

"Why, there's no more a 'Bill Hammersley,'" she cried, with a gesture of excited emphasis, "than there is a 'Simple-doria!'"

"So it appears," I agreed.

"He's lived there all alone," she said, solemnly, "in that big house, so long, just sitting there evening after evening, all by himself, never going out, never reading anything, not even thinking; but just sitting and sitting and sitting—Well, she broke off suddenly, shook the frown from her forehead, and made me the offer of a dazzling smile, "there's no use both-ering one's own head about it."

"I'm glad to have a fellow-witness," I said. "It's so eerie I might have concluded there was something the matter with me."

"You're going to your work?" she asked, as I turned toward the gate.

"I'm very glad I don't have to go to mine."

"Yours?" I inquired, rather blankly.

"I teach algebra and plane geometry at the High school," said this surprising young woman. "Thank Heaven, it's Saturday! I'm reading 'Les Miserables' for the seventh time, and I'm going to have a real orgy over Ger-vaise and the barricade this afternoon!"

"Because she said he was a man of no imagination."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

## AN EPITOME OF LATE LIVE NEWS

CONDENSED RECORD OF THE PROGRESS OF EVENTS AT HOME AND ABROAD.

### FROM ALL SOURCES

SAYINGS, DOINGS, ACHIEVEMENTS, SUFFERINGS, HOPES AND FEARS OF MANKIND.

#### WESTERN

The crew of the British tramp steamer *Oteric*, which went on the rocks seventy miles north of San Francisco, was transferred to the freighter *Cotton Plant*. The transfer of the fifty-five members of the *Oteric's* crew was a dangerous piece of work and was only attempted as a last resort.

John H. Hays, a rancher near Havre, Mont., killed his wife and himself, according to a story told officers by his 15-year-old son. The deaths left six children orphans. The 15-year-old boy, the oldest, fled into the night with the mercury 30 degrees below zero, in search of help, while the two youngest slept soundly.

Articles of incorporation of a \$10,000,000 shipping company, which will carry fruit between Pacific and Atlantic ports, were filed in Sacramento with Secretary of State Frank C. Jordan. Thirteen shares of the company, which is to be called the Motorship Transportation Company, have been subscribed, according to the papers.

A riot, precipitated by the agitation of forty I. W. W., resulted in a serious battle between police and prisoners in the Lincoln Heights jail at Los Angeles. The trouble started when no noon meal was served the prisoners on account of the fact that attempts had been made to start trouble among prisoners who were working about the jail.

The British tramp steamer *Oteric* has broken in two after having been aground on a sharp ledge of rocks near Fish Rock, seventy miles north of San Francisco, according to a message received by the Radio Corporation of America station at San Francisco. The skeleton crew of twelve men, under Capt. Vincent Harper, transhipped to the salvage steamer *Homer*.

Arthur C. Burch, formerly of Evans-ton, Ill., has been given his freedom at Los Angeles, after standing trial three times for murder and once for insanity. The juries on the murder charge all disagreed and the alienists at the insanity hearing did likewise, but the weight of expressed belief of the latter was that Burch was sane, or harmless if insane, so his freedom was restored to him.

#### WASHINGTON

A young man who said he was Del Gibbs, 21 years old, held in Los Angeles to answer three charges of burglary, was declared by the police to have confessed he was wanted in Kansas City, Mo., for the murder of Theodore Van Thess, a cigar dealer, who was slain in the Missouri city last July in an attempt to rob him of \$12,000.

Defective equipment has doubled engine accidents and quadrupled fatalities on the railroads since the start of the rail strike, government statistics introduced in the Daugherty impeachment hearings revealed. The figures were introduced by counsel for Representative Keller to prove Attorney General Daugherty failed to require observance of railroad statutes.

Racing at top speed, the House passed the annual supply bill for the Departments of Commerce and Labor, carrying approximately \$19,000,000 for the former and \$8,500,000 for the latter.

The expansion of employment throughout the nation in the month of November was the greatest within the year, according to the survey of the Department of Labor. For the past month fifty-two of the sixty-five leading cities from which reports were received showed increased employment.

The finishing touches were put on the plan worked out by the congressional joint committee on the reorganization of the administration branch of the government at a conference with President Harding, Walter F. Brown, chairman of the committee, announced in Washington.

Construction of a memorial bridge across the Delaware river at a point where Washington and his troops crossed before the battle of Trenton was authorized in a bill passed by the Senate. Four other bridge bills were passed, including authority for construction of a bridge across the Colorado river at Yuma, Ariz.

George Leroy Spees, confessed slayer of John Shurtz, Middletown, Iowa, farmer, at midnight, Sept. 12 last, was sentenced to life imprisonment in the penitentiary at Fort Madison, Iowa, and within one hour after sentence he was in the prison, nineteen miles away.

Declaring that a bonus to soldiers was as justifiable as "a bonus to the ship operators," Senator Simmons, Democrat, North Carolina, reintroduced the soldier bonus bill vetoed by President Harding as an amendment to the administration shipping bill.

#### FOREIGN

The residence of J. J. Walsh, postmaster general of the Irish Free State, and other government officials in Dublin were attacked by armed men and set on fire, recently.

Rory O'Connor and Liam Mellowes and two other Irish rebels were executed in Mount Joy prison in Dublin. The other two men executed were John McKilvey and Richard Barrett, both prominent Republicans.

The London conference of allied premiers, called to arrange the basis for an allied financial and reparations conference in Brussels, has broken down. The premiers had taken adjournment until Jan. 2.

Two arrests have been made in connection with the shooting of Mason Mitchell, American consul at Valetta, Malta. Mr. Mitchell is suffering from a flesh wound in the left side which is said to be not of a serious nature.

One hundred workmen were killed or injured in a boiler explosion which wrecked the Estrella sugar mill, near Camaguey, Havana. Most of the victims are Spaniards. Two of the sugar central's big battery of boilers are reported to have exploded simultaneously.

William Pepper, an Englishman employed by the Canadian Pacific Railway Company in its trans-Pacific steamship service, was stabbed to death on the main street of Yokohama by a Japanese whom he had discharged as a member of a launch crew. The slayer surrendered to the police.

The Nobel peace prize has been presented to Dr. Fridtjof Nansen of Christiania, Norway. The award was made for Dr. Nansen's work in relieving the starving populations of Russia and Asia Minor on behalf of the League of Nations and for his endeavors to promote a brotherhood of nations.

The Near East peace conference was saved from collapse when Ismet Pasha, head of the Turkish delegation, announced at Lausanne that Turkey would join the League of Nations. A compromise plan was submitted by the Turks for safe-guarding Christians in Asia Minor. The backdown of the Turks means a peaceful continuation of the conference, the British delegates said.

#### GENERAL

John Wanamaker died in Philadelphia recently.

Three persons burned to death at Buffalo, N. Y., in fires which drove many victims into the bitter cold and led \$500,000 property damage.

"Do your Christmas mailing early" and other slogans designed to impress upon holiday users the importance of co-operation with the postal authorities were flashed from motion picture screens in all parts of the country, it was announced in New York by Postmaster Morgan.

Bainbridge Colby, secretary of state in President Wilson's cabinet, has announced that his law partnership with the former President would terminate Dec. 31, at the expiration of their co-partnership agreement. The announcement was made from the New York offices of Wilson & Colby.

A verdict for the defendant concluded a suit in Federal Court at Oxford, Miss., for \$100,000 damages, filed by Miss Frances C. Birkhead, stenographer, against Lee M. Russell, Mississippi's chief executive. Miss Birkhead had asked for \$50,000 on each of two counts—one charging seduction and the other impairment of health as the result of an alleged operation.

One man was killed, two policemen were wounded, one probably fatally, and a companion of the dead man is in a hospital, the result of a shooting affray at Crestline, Ohio. The officers suspected the men of being bootleggers. When they approached them the men opened fire, the officers said. The patrolmen returned the fire, one of the men dropping dead from wounds.

Frank Leroy Chance, who will manage the Boston club of the American League, before leaving Los Angeles recently for the East, signed Orvie Over-all, formerly a pitcher for the Chicago club of the National League, to become his assistant in the Red Sox management, according to statements published in Los Angeles.

The activities of Madame Gadski, concert and opera singer, during the recent war, were "entirely honorable," according to a statement issued in San Francisco by Seth Millington, commander of the American Legion, Department of California. "There is no reason why ex-service men should take offense at any proposed concert given by Madame Gadski," Commander Millington stated.

Proof that Bolshevik Russia is highly dissatisfied with Turkey because Ismet Pasha has abandoned the Russians on the question of the Dardanelles was found at Lausanne when M. Tchitcherin, the soviet foreign minister, issued an urgent invitation to the Turkish journalists, and in the course of a long speech warned them of the dangers of placing their trust in the allied nations.

While the main lobby of the Live-stock Exchange building in Kansas City was filled with cattle commissionmen and stockyards employes three bandits shot and probably fatally wounded Thomas F. A. Henry, credit manager of the Drovers National Bank and escaped with loot reported to be \$40,000.

The death of four more persons brought the toll from the recent Southern Pacific wreck at Humble, seven-eighths miles from Houston, Texas, to fourteen. At least thirty others were injured more or less severely.

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